



# **PRESS CONFERENCE**

## **ORGANIZED BY LIEGE 2015, BRUSSELS**

In the name of Participatory Democracy

Popular consultation of 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2009 in Liège

# PRESS CONFERENCE ORGANIZED BY LIÈGE 2015, BRUSSELS.



## IN THE NAME OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

POPULAR CONSULTATION OF 22ND FEBRUARY 2009 IN LIÈGE

17<sup>th</sup> February 2009

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On 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2009, the inhabitants of Liège aged of over 16 years, of all nationalities, will have the chance to express their opinion about the question: « Do you wish the City of Liège to apply for the title of European Capital of Culture in 2015 ».

This consultation was made possible in December 2008 thanks to the participation of about 30,000 people, among who 22,000 reside on the territory of the commune. If Liège wants to apply to this title, at least 20,000 inhabitants must mobilize to go and vote on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> February.

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*« The Congress [of Europe] have always been convinced about the importance of civil society, in particular the role of non-governmental organizations and associations, in the development of participatory democracy to 're-invigorate ' the democratic structure at local level. »<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Conseil de L'Europe, Session de printemps, Strasbourg, 27-28 mars 2007, Résolution 228  
<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1300191&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=DBDCF2&BackColorIntranet=FDC864&BackColorLogged=FDC864>

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## **LIÈGE**

Liège has 192,718 inhabitants. Its agglomeration has about 600,000 inhabitants and it is the official economical capital of Wallonia. Based on the amount of inhabitants, it is the third agglomeration of Belgium after Brussels and Antwerp, and it is the fourth city after Antwerp, Ghent and Charleroi

## **STAKES**

By organizing this press conference, we would like to highlights the local or regional stakes of the popular consultation for the candidature of Liège for the title of European capital of culture in 2015 and to draw your attention to:

- The aspect of participatory democracy initiated by this unique event where each engaged citizen will have a say in a common idea and future of Liège.
- As far as we know, there is no precedent given the support and the topic of the popular consultation neither in Belgium nor in Europe. We want to high light that this is a noble process within a mature democracy.
- The different key events that led to this popular consultation and its contradiction against the spirit of the European Commission's decision (n°1622/2006/CE) concerning the NEW selection procedure for the European capital of culture.
- That the popular consultation is a result of the wish of more than 30 000 individual to express themselves concerning this topic and to take their destiny in their hands. Such popular movement is unprecedented and we hope it will be taken into seriously.

## **LIÈGE 2015**

The Collective Liège 2015 is made up by citizens from all different horizons of the civil society living in Liège. It is not a representative authority nor politically driven but a group which stimulates ideas, spirits and consciences. The collective consists of individual who worked on a volunteering basis to contribute their time, energy and expertise for the love and future of their city.

The sole objective of the collective is to see to that the public authorities of the city of Liège will do their utmost to secure the chance for Liège to be the European Capital of Culture in 2015. By this definition the Collective Liège 2015 is a pressure group that represents the dreams of the popular public.

The Collective Liège 2015 is involved in the preparation of the pre-selection application led by the city of Liège and is campaigning to mobilize the popular public to go and vote in mass on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February.

## CONTEXT OF THE CONSULTATION

The huge success of the petition (hand written) organized by the collectif Liège 2015 led to an unanimous decision of the local communal council on the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2008 to organize a popular consultation on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2009<sup>2</sup>.

**Below are key events leading to 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 2008.**

- **2004 :** The government of the French Community of Belgium voted unanimously that Mons will be the European capital of culture in 2015<sup>3</sup>.
- **2006:** European Commission decision (n°1622/2006/CE) concerning the NEW selection procedure of the European capital of culture based on the Palmer report<sup>4</sup> that analysed the result of the different cities that had hosted the title, followed by some recommendation for improvement.
- **2<sup>nd</sup> May 2008:** The start of the petition on the Internet. Collected more than 9000 signatures.

Elio Di Rupo, the mayor of Mons and president of the socialist party in Wallonia declared : « *Each city has the right to apply : the next Belgian city will have the opportunity to become European capital of culture in 2027 (!)... Soon as a tender will be officially announced (for the selection of year 2015) , where each city will have 10 months to prepare and submit its application. And may the best project wins. »*

- **10<sup>th</sup> June 2008:** the authorities of the city of Liège publicly refuse to apply for the candidature of year 2015. And up roar of different cultural actors and the citizen of Liège started to collect hand written signatures with full name and home address of the petitioner.
- **15th July 2008:** the Walloon government allocated a subsidy of 1 million Euros <sup>5</sup>in favor of the Foundation Mons 2015 (*even though Mons is not yet officially selected by the European commission to be the European capital of culture in 2015*)
- **10th September 2008:** The publication of the official tender in the 'Moniteur belge' <sup>6</sup> calling for any interested cities to submit their application for the title of the European capital of culture in 2015 stating that the pre-selection application must be submitted by 1st March 2009. (*the initial delay of 10 months is now reduced to 6 months*)

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/gazette-de-liege/article/469637/liege-2015-le-conseil-communal-accepte-la-consultation-populaire.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.proxiliege.net/index.php?page=article&id=2737&idrub=2>

<sup>4</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/pdf/doc654\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/pdf/doc654_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Programme justificatif du projet de décret du Gouvernement Wallon  
[http://nautilus.parlement-wallon.be/Archives/2007\\_2008/BUDGET/bud54.pdf](http://nautilus.parlement-wallon.be/Archives/2007_2008/BUDGET/bud54.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> L'appel à candidatures publié au « Moniteur belge »

[http://www.fadilalaanan.net/downloads/pdf/CapitaleEuropeenneCulture\\_AppelMoniteur\\_16.09.2008.pdf](http://www.fadilalaanan.net/downloads/pdf/CapitaleEuropeenneCulture_AppelMoniteur_16.09.2008.pdf)

- **30<sup>th</sup> September 2008:** the Minister of Culture of the French Community of Belgium considers the selection is done and declares that « ....it will be Mons, it is obvious. »<sup>7</sup>, (whereby the official tender had just been published !)
- **14<sup>th</sup> December 2008:** 22.000 hand written signatures of inhabitants of the commune of Liège with post code 4000 to 4032 were collected. (In total more than 30.000 were collected ).
- **18th December 2008:** The subsidies for the project « Mons 2015 » has been risen to 2 million euros<sup>8</sup> for 2009 (against 1 million euro in 2008).<sup>9</sup>
- **22nd December 2008:** The communal council of the city of Liège unanimously voted in favour of the organization of a Popular Consultation. The Popular consultation will take place on 22nd February, exactly one week before the deadline of submission of applications (1<sup>st</sup> March 2009).
- **15<sup>th</sup> January 2009:** The head of the council of culture of the city of Liège Mr. Hupkens was appointed to lead an extended group of the cultural commission of Liège to prepare for the pre-selection application. ('just' in case of a successful popular consultation on 22nd February 2009....).
- **22<sup>nd</sup> February 2009:** The historical day (result in 5 days)..



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<sup>7</sup> Le Soir, « Mons sera capitale de la culture en 2015 », 30/09/2008

[http://www.lesoir.be/culture/air\\_du\\_temps/institutions-fadila-laanane-2008-09-30-644041.shtml](http://www.lesoir.be/culture/air_du_temps/institutions-fadila-laanane-2008-09-30-644041.shtml)

<sup>8</sup> Programme justificatif du projet de décret du Gouvernement Wallon , p 5

[http://nautilus.parlement-wallon.be/Archives/2008\\_2009/BUDGET/bud20.pdf](http://nautilus.parlement-wallon.be/Archives/2008_2009/BUDGET/bud20.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Programme justificatif du projet de décret du Gouvernement Wallon

[http://nautilus.parlement-wallon.be/Archives/2007\\_2008/BUDGET/bud54.pdf](http://nautilus.parlement-wallon.be/Archives/2007_2008/BUDGET/bud54.pdf)